

Festival's glow will warm residents through the winter; Columnist.

Byline: Paul Benneworth

I WAS surprised when I went to university that what I thought was the standard English we spoke at home contained some distinctive local words.

My grandfather was an English teacher, so I assumed if he used words, then they were proper English.

One of his favourites was femmer, which he used to describe something fragile or delicate, but in Oxford, they'd never heard this word before.

Another such word was the fret, which elsewhere in England can mean either a nagging worry or a guitar neck. But for me, this will always be the sea fog that rolls in off Tynemouth Longsands and chases you all the way to Billy Mill Roundabout.

The fret happens when hot summer weather meets the cold North Sea to give an icy fog. Knowing why it happens is cold comfort for freezing beachgoers shivering back to the Metro stations, dreams of a balmy day out in tatters.

But the current heat wave, unlike most, has reached our coast without the fret raising its head.

I was delighted it stayed well away from Tynemouth for the Mouth of the Tyne Festival last weekend. I had a soft spot for its predecessor, the North Shields Fish Quay Festival, because it was where I first met my wife.

I had great memories of the event together with Leanne over the years. It was always incredible to see the once-dilapidated North Shields quayside thronging with crowds, and it gave a chance to enjoy great live music locally in a real festival atmosphere.

Its success saw it grow to become too big for the council to handle, and so it was downscaled before finally being cancelled in 2006. But in the outcry that followed, the Mouth of the Tyne Festival was developed as a partnership between Tynemouth and South Shields.

It quickly established its reputation by attracting world-class headline acts, who perform against the stunning backdrop of the Tynemouth Priory and Castle. This year's festival was fronted by James Morrison and the Human League, with appearances from many other household names.

Small festivals are now a staple of regional development. Their themes cover everything from Death Metal in Finland to Elvis in Australia and Enschede's Art in the Park classical festival here in the Netherlands.

Research has long explored the local value of mega-festivals like Glastonbury, but more recently we have started to understand the value of more modest events like the Tynemouth one.

The best festivals are the ones that fit with the spirit of their place. The Mouth of the Tyne draws on Tynemouth's heritage as a 900-year-old village with a stunning monument at its heart. These festivals also follow in the tradition of the country show, documented by Harry Pearson in *Racing Pigs And Giant Marrows*. Such shows and fairs help define and give meaning to villages, even remote ones like Cambo.

The value of the festival should not just be thought of as the 'cold' value of the money spent in

Tynemouth's cafes and restaurants over the weekend, although it's not to be sniffed at.

Good festivals and fairs also bring people together and give them reasons to interact, whether comparing notes on the acts with strangers on Front Street or competing to bake the best scones. They become a high point of the summer that keeps people talking with each other throughout the year, and in the case of the giant marrow growers, labouring in their allotment trenches in the dark winter months.

A successful festival fills a place with pride and confidence that goes far beyond those that attend the concerts. We can think in terms of their 'warm' value, the positive feelings created amongst locals in the village and beyond.

Ultimately, this makes a place more attractive to residents, businesses, visitors, even government. And the Mouth of the Tyne Festival gives Tynemouth residents a much-needed warm glow to keep persevering through the North Sea fret.

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